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Chairman: Mr. Yousfi ..... (Algeria)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Saha

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 121: Pattern of conferences (A/61/32, A/61/129 and Add.1, A/61/300 and A/61/499)

1. **Ms. Udo** (Chairperson of the Committee on Conferences), introducing the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/61/32), said that for the first time it consolidated most of the items on the Committee's agenda in one document. She noted that the draft resolution contained in the report had been adopted by the Committee on Conferences by consensus.

2. In the draft resolution, the Committee on Conferences approved the draft calendar of conferences and meetings of the Organization for 2007. It expressed satisfaction with the increase in the overall utilization rate of conference services at the four main duty stations to 85 per cent. In that regard, she had conducted consultations with the chairpersons and secretaries of bodies that had consistently underutilized their resources with a view to identifying ways and means of improving the utilization rate. As a direct result, in 2006 three such bodies had attained or surpassed the 80 per cent benchmark. Future chairpersons of the Committee should continue to hold such consultations, especially with the incoming chairpersons of underutilizing bodies. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management should also continue its proactive approach to planning and intergovernmental bodies should be more realistic in their requests for conference services. It had been noted with concern that while the percentage of meetings of regional and other major groups provided with interpretation services had increased to 87 per cent in 2005, that was below the levels attained in previous reporting periods.

3. The Committee on Conferences had noted that all meetings at Nairobi-based bodies had taken place in Nairobi in 2005, and had requested the Secretary-General to explore means of increasing the utilization of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) conference centre.

4. The Committee on Conferences had stressed the need to take into account the effect of the implementation of the capital master plan on meetings held at Headquarters, without compromising quality, and, with regard to the integrated global management project, had welcomed the progress made, while requesting assurances that new technologies would be compatible and user-friendly as well as more information on the work of the relevant task forces and on follow-up to their recommendations. It had reiterated concerns relating to the delayed and late issuance of documentation in all official languages and taken note of the efforts of the Secretariat to clear the backlog of summary records.

5. With regard to translation and interpretation, the Committee on Conferences had expressed concern at the level of self-revision and high vacancy rates in Nairobi, underscored the need for succession planning given the changes in the workforce that would take place over the next few years, and asked for periodic reports on the proposal to develop a comprehensive methodology for performance measurement and management. She noted that the annual videoconference discussion with other duty stations had focused on quality of services and client satisfaction and the draft resolution therefore requested the Secretary-General to report on the quality of interpretation services at all duty stations.

6. **Mr. Chen** Jian (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management) introduced the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/61/129 and Add.1), submitted for the first time as a single, consolidated document, in keeping with reforms aimed at streamlining reporting. The report covered a wide range of issues concerning the Secretariat's efforts to respond to requests made by Member States, including innovative options for servicing meetings of regional groups. With regard to conference services at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON), there had been a notable improvement in the utilization rate for interpreters in 2004-2005, and candidates had been selected for an information technology post and to fill vacancies in the Arabic interpretation booth. He added that the United Nations Office at Nairobi and the Economic Commission for Africa were strengthening their collaboration so as to share best practices in conference servicing.

7. The report contained a number of new elements. Information was provided on accountability, document management, summary records and performance indicators. The aim was to shift the emphasis away from workload standards, which gave a crude measure of performance, focusing on quantity alone, to broader, higher-level metrics of full-system performance. The conclusions were often also proposals on what needed

to be done to better implement the mandates entrusted to the Secretariat, and it was important for the Committee to provide guidance on such issues as the timely submission and control of documents, and transparency and accountability measures. In that regard, he expressed appreciation for the view of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) that the timely submission of documents should be included in the proposed programme budget as a performance indicator for author departments.

8. For the first time the report contained management statistics for the submission, processing and issuance of pre-session documents for the first half of 2006 (annex IV), in response to requests from Member States for clear accountability in the Secretariat. They provided the basis for the conclusions drawn with regard to document management (chap. IV) and, taken together with the traditional meeting statistics for a core sample of bodies, should help paint a full picture of the two major components of conference management.

9. The report (annex V) also contained the first statement ever adopted by the executive session of the 2006 International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications (IAMLADP). Given the difficulty of finding qualified language staff and upcoming demographic changes in the language services, the members of IAMLADP were of the view that the training of staff should be accorded a high priority. His Department had therefore undertaken a planning exercise in respect of language staff indicating the requirements for recruitment examinations over the next five years, and had communicated the results to the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM). The Committee must support the Secretariat's efforts to provide adequate resources for conference services. His Department also intended to enhance internal and external training programmes, develop staff exchanges between organizations and participate in outreach activities to institutions that trained language staff for international organizations. In that connection the possibility of tailoring translation and interpretation training programmes at various universities to the needs of the Organization was being explored.

10. The report of the Secretary-General on the impact of the capital master plan on meetings to be held at Headquarters during its implementation (A/61/300), made it clear that careful advance planning would prevent the core activities of the Organization from being adversely affected; it contained several recommendations that the Committee might wish to make to the General Assembly. In that regard, he expressed appreciation for the consensus opinion of the Committee on Conferences that the implementation of the capital master plan should not compromise the quality of conference services or the equal treatment of the language services.

11. Reviewing his term of office as Under-Secretary-General, he noted that the Department had implemented a proactive approach to conference management and was well on its way towards integrated global management. A proactive approach had also been adopted at the operational level and the concept of full-system benefits had been introduced. More specifically, in the area of document management, advance planning in the form of the slotting system and waiver management were promoting the timely submission of documents, while document processing had been facilitated by capacity planning that synchronized upstream planning with downstream processing. The introduction of e-flow, print-on-demand and the expansion of contractual and off-site translation had contributed to more cost-effective operations as well as the timely issuance of documents.

12. Calendar management and more efficient programming, including through the use of the e-Meets system already in operation at all four duty stations of the Department, had led to improved utilization of conference-servicing resources. Good progress had also been made towards global management of conference services; common approaches to policies, practices and procedures had been identified with a view to standardization among the four duty stations and the information technology global initiative had also been launched. The trust and goodwill generated by constant interaction between the duty stations would ensure further rationalization of conference-servicing operations.

13. A serious effort had likewise been made to address the concerns of Member States. Summary records of the General Assembly were currently issued within three months of the closure of meetings; backlogs dating back to 2003 had been cleared and records predating 2002 were being worked on; annual surveys of a core sample of intergovernmental bodies

were conducted and information meetings on the quality of language services were held twice yearly. With the help of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), efforts to improve procedures for measuring Member States' satisfaction with conference services would be made, including through design of a more effective survey. Specific complaints from Member States were looked into immediately and remedial measures taken.

14. Careful planning and diligent implementation had been the keys to the progress made. Of the four goals set for the Department, timeliness and cost-effectiveness had improved. Enhancing productivity through the use of a full-system approach was a continuous process that had already led to noticeable improvements in efficiency. Improving quality had always been a priority for the Department, even though that goal was affected by factors that were sometimes beyond its control.

15. He stressed that over the past five years he had been impressed by the professionalism and dedication of the staff of the Department, even under very difficult circumstances. They were truly the Organization's greatest assets.

16. Five years earlier it had been clear that reform of the Department, while necessary, would be a difficult task. He would leave the Department gratified that that reform, and all the tangible progress made, had put the Department in a stronger position for the future, although he was likewise fully aware that much more remained to be done. The guidance of the Committee in that regard would be most timely and appreciated.

17. **Mr. Saha** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the report of the Advisory Committee (A/61/499) on its review of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/61/129 and Add.1), said that the Advisory Committee had noted the progress made in promoting global management of conference services while ensuring quality and encouraged further efforts in that regard. With regard to the utilization of conference-servicing resources, the Advisory Committee had noted the improvement in the utilization factor, and requested a detailed explanation of all the factors that contributed to a loss of time for conference servicing. The Advisory Committee also requested that information on in-house printing capacity should be included in future reports and expressed concern that methods and indicators to assess productivity, efficiency and cost-effectiveness had not yet been implemented. Lastly, the Advisory Committee noted the intention to introduce additional performance indicators.

18. **Ms. Lock** (South Africa), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, expressed appreciation for the efforts of the Under-Secretary-General to improve conference management. She said the Group of 77 and China attached great importance to the quality of conference services and supported the recommendations made by the Committee on Conferences in its report (A/61/32) as well as the draft resolution contained therein.

19. She welcomed the improvement in the utilization rate of conference resources, in particular at New York, but stressed the need to develop a more precise measure of time lost in order to ensure a more accurate calculation of the utilization factor. She said that future chairpersons of the Committee on Conferences should continue the practice initiated by the current Chairperson of consulting with intergovernmental bodies which had not utilized their allocated resources for the previous three years and also build on the three-pronged approach identified by her.

20. The fact that the United Nations Office at Nairobi, uniquely, had to rely on extrabudgetary resources for nearly half its funding for conference resources as well as for central planning and coordination remained a concern. That was contrary to the wish of the General Assembly that all duty stations should be treated equally; the issue should be addressed in future budget discussions. She commended the Assistant Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management for his efforts to increase utilization of the conference facilities at the Economic Commission for Africa and for his visit to Nairobi.

21. She expressed concern that in spite of the request made by the General Assembly in its resolution 60/236 B that the Secretary-General should explore ways to improve the provision of services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States, such services were still provided on an ad hoc basis and often depended on the cancellation of other meetings. That was not a long-term solution, bearing in mind the need for calendar bodies to improve their utilization factor. She looked forward to further

explanation of the proposals made by the Secretary-General to address the problem, in particular the earmarking of special resources and calendar programming to provide more reliable meeting servicing, proposals the Group of 77 and China would support.

22. The Department had unfortunately failed to remedy the chronic problem of late issuance of documents, which had negative effects on the legislative process. Although it was primarily up to the Department to take action, the Secretary-General should also hold author departments accountable for submitting documents late, thus preventing it from complying with the six-week rule.

23. Although the General Assembly, in its resolution 60/236 B, had urged the development of an accountability mechanism for the submission, processing and issuance of documentation in the Secretariat, the Committee on Conferences had so far made no recommendations in that regard. The Group hoped that it would do so as soon as possible. Recalling that the General Assembly had established page-limit guidelines for Secretariat documents in its resolutions 52/214 and 57/283, it reiterated that limits should not be applied to intergovernmental bodies, should be implemented flexibly, and should not harm the quality of documents from the point of view of content or presentation. The rules on simultaneous distribution of hard copies and the posting on websites of documents in all official languages must be adhered to, as the General Assembly had reiterated in its resolution 55/222. The frequent failures to comply must be explained. Summary and verbatim records played an important role as the institutional memory of the Organization. The Group welcomed the pilot project improving their availability, and would like further details of the possibility of setting a time frame for their issuance.

24. The continuing problem of high vacancy rates, particularly for Arabic interpreters at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, was a matter of concern. More concrete action to address it could include calling on the Member States to help advertise and organize competitive examinations; the Group had already offered its assistance. As translation and interpretation must be of the highest quality, cost-savings should not be placed above quality when recruiting short-term staff for the language services. The Group looked forward to receiving the Secretariat's assessment of the integrated global management system, and supported the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences regarding the impact on meetings of the capital master plan.

25. **Mr. Pyysalo** (Finland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania; the candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia; and, in addition, Iceland, Moldova, Norway and Ukraine, said that the intergovernmental organs and expert bodies of the United Nations could not work successfully without effective conference support in the form of timely issuance of documentation, high-quality language services and suitable meeting facilities. At the same time, conference management consumed regular budget resources, so effectiveness, efficiency, accuracy, quality and consistency in all official languages were a concern.

26. The Department had made progress in many areas of reform, including pro-active document management, capacity calculations, terminology coordination, computer-assisted translation and the global information technology initiative, thus responding to the mandates it had been given by the Member States. It should continue those initiatives and improve the coordination of conference servicing. The European Union, welcoming the improvement in timely submission of documents and the rate of utilization of conference services, agreed with the Advisory Committee that any loss of time in conference servicing must be identified and explained. The availability and quality of conference services must be maintained while the capital master plan was being implemented. The European Union noted the recommendations of the Secretary-General in that regard (A/61/300), particularly that meetings should be held within regular meeting hours to allow for uninterrupted construction work. It also supported the resolution proposed by the Committee on Conferences (A/61/32, annex I), though it remained concerned by, and would raise in informal consultations, some issues which remained outside the draft.

27. **Mr. Ibsen** (United States of America) said that his delegation wished to commend the Committee on Conferences for its consensus draft resolution and hoped that the Member States would carefully consider its report (A/61/32). Aware that the budget for

conference management was almost $590 million for the biennium 2006-2007, he urged the Member States to encourage the Department to pursue its efforts to improve effectiveness and efficiency. Any reduction in the future cost, frequency and duration of meetings would be a step in the right direction.

28. With the rate of utilization of conference services having improved, the Department should continue efforts to prevent loss of resources through meetings which started late, ended early or were cancelled, events which were avoidable if committee chairmen communicated effectively with it. His delegation strongly favoured retaining the existing ad hoc arrangement of providing conference services for regional and other major groups as and when resources were available. Despite the limited resources available and the rise in the number of requests for services, a reasonable 87 per cent of them had been satisfied. As the Department was seeking to streamline, not expand, operations, it should not invest the additional resources needed to satisfy all of those requests. It should work with the chairmen of Main Committees and conferences to make arrangements with regional groups similar to those which the Fifth Committee had concluded. His delegation was pleased that timely submission of documents had improved and was being included as a performance indicator in the Secretary-General's annual compact with department heads, enhancing transparency and accountability. It encouraged use of online resources to cut waste.

29. **Mr. Muhith** (Bangladesh) said that efficient conference management was vital to the intergovernmental process. The draft resolution proposed by the Committee on Conferences was a positive step, as it reflected the Member States' discussions during its session, facilitated the work of the Fifth Committee and would help the Department to carry out its mandated responsibilities more efficiently. The Department's reform effort, currently in its fifth year, had made considerable progress, but must be pursued. Reform was not an event, but a continuous process.

30. The integrated global management of conference services had successfully brought the New York, Geneva, Nairobi and Vienna duty stations closer together. His delegation hoped that their use of computer-assisted translation would help to improve the quality of their products and services. As the Department was responsible for the overall management of conference services in those four locations, his delegation would like further details of its reported lack of oversight and control in connection with common resources in duty stations outside New York. He would like further details of the information technology global initiative and the information technology governance board, as duty stations must be able to gather, consult and share information readily.

31. Timely issuance of documents was a vital part of the smooth and effective running of the intergovernmental process. Despite recent improvement, it remained a perennial problem. His delegation concurred with the Advisory Committee's view that the issue must be included in the proposed programme budget as a performance indicator for author departments. Another long-standing problem was the vacancy rate in language sections at several duty stations, particularly Nairobi. His delegation hoped that the Secretariat could propose innovative ideas for a solution, as the issue would only get worse with the retirement of 20 per cent of Headquarters language staff within five years.

32. **Mr. Golovinov** (Russian Federation), expressing the view that the Committee on Conferences played a central role in managing the Organization's meetings and conferences, welcomed the successful conclusion of its session and the resulting draft resolution, which would facilitate the work of the Fifth Committee. The reform initiatives of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management were important, being aimed at improving the quality of services to the Member States in the six official languages at United Nations headquarters and offices. However, reform must result in the careful and gradual replacement of ineffective or outdated practices or equipment. All prospective new methods should be carefully analysed to ensure that they were proven, could bring the expected results and could accommodate the unique features both of the Department's work and of each duty station.

33. The key to making integrated global management of conference services a success was to achieve a balanced division of labour among headquarters and other offices, with the Department in a coordinating role. Integrated global management should help to bring about the posting of all United Nations documents on the Web, the availability of user-friendly information technology in all official languages and the unification of United Nations terminology in a manner

which adhered to up-to-date grammatical and stylistic usage for each of those languages.

34. Unfortunately, the rule requiring simultaneous distribution of United Nations documents in all six official languages — confirmed by numerous General Assembly resolutions — continued to be frequently broken. A particularly clear recent example was the issuance of the First Consolidated Report 2005, prepared in compliance with section V of General Assembly resolution 60/283 on investing in the United Nations: for a stronger Organization worldwide, in only one of the six official languages, disregarding both the simultaneous distribution rule and the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. As that report figured in the Fifth Committee programme of work, his delegation wished the Secretariat to reissue the document rapidly in all the official languages and explain how the situation had arisen.

35. As a key gauge of the quality of conference services provided by the Department was Member States' satisfaction, the Department should develop a comprehensive system for ongoing client evaluation. The Member States must be given equal opportunities to inform the senior managers of the Department of their assessment, in line with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 60/236 B. The information meetings which the Department held twice a year for Member States were a positive development which explained current conference-servicing issues to delegates and enabled them to express their views. However, the Department must ensure that those views were acted on. His delegation continued to be concerned at the uneven quality of interpretation from Russian into English. Interpretation and translation into Russian were not beyond criticism, but had recently improved. It had particularly noted the steps taken by the Russian Translation Service to improve individual translators' accountability for the quality of their work.

36. The competitive examinations for Russian-language interpreters, translators, editors and verbatim reporters held in 2005 and 2006 should help the Secretariat to recruit qualified staff. His delegation hoped that competitive examinations for other official languages would also be a success, and fully supported the initiative of establishing more active contact with higher-education institutions in order to improve the supply of language staff. The Department should also bear in mind that all the language services should have equally favourable treatment with regard to working conditions and human and financial resources in order to ensure that the quality of conference services remained consistent. Those issues had been raised by the General Assembly in its resolutions 59/265 and 60/236 B. The implementation of the capital master plan must not jeopardize the quality of conference servicing or the equal treatment of all Secretariat language services.

37. **Mr. Diab** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation attached great importance to multilingualism, a key distinguishing feature of the Organization. For Member State representatives to be able to carry out their work, the issuance of documents, translation and interpretation, whether in the context of formal or informal meetings of Main Committees and subsidiary bodies, must comply with the criteria of quality and accuracy. As the intergovernmental body responsible for dealing with conference services, and a particularly important forum for delegations which used languages other than English, the Committee on Conferences had submitted an enlightening and useful report.

38. His delegation was pleased that the conference services utilization rate had improved, but stressed that all duty stations must receive equal treatment, especially in terms of investment, as the General Assembly had requested in a number of its resolutions. The high vacancy rates in the Arabic-language services in Nairobi was a continuing problem which the Secretariat should address, perhaps by asking Member States to help advertise vacancies and organize examinations. Another concern was the projection that 20 per cent of Headquarters language staff would retire within five years. His delegation supported Secretariat efforts to forge closer links with universities to ensure that graduates acquired the skills which the Organization needed.

39. Coordination was needed to ensure that translation and interpretation reflected up-to-date usage in grammar and vocabulary and efforts must continue to ensure that documents were of good quality and issued simultaneously in all official languages in a timely manner. His delegation regretted that certain documents were posted on the Web in a limited number of languages. The Organization must continue to provide conference services for regional and other groups, which could not work without such facilities. As summary records constituted the institutional memory of the Organization, his delegation

commended the pilot project to clear the backlog of unissued documents and supported the idea of issuance according to a fixed timetable.

40. **Mr. Shen** Yanjie (China) commended the progress achieved by the Department for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Management over the past five years. From being a reactive service, the Department had gradually become proactive, making great strides in global management, servicing the meetings of regional groups, providing conference services and introducing performance measurement. It had also intensified the use of information technology, thus making possible improved interaction between the four United Nations duty stations and improving the quality of service overall.

41. The position with regard to the submission of documents had also improved. Greater flexibility and a greater awareness of priorities had been shown, which had facilitated the timely issuance of documents. Since delays were frequently due to late submission by the authors, he encouraged the Department to enhance communication with author departments in order to reduce delays still further.

42. With regard to accountability, the Department had gradually introduced performance assessment measures, including client satisfaction. His delegation also commended the measures taken to improve the quality of the language services by training additional language staff and holding information meetings with Member States twice a year in order to get client feedback. The Department must ensure that the latest technology was used by interpreters and translators. Freelance language staff should enjoy working conditions equal to those of permanent staff. It was essential that documents should be distributed simultaneously in all six official languages to reflect their equal importance.

43. **Mr. Hussain** (Pakistan) said that the action taken by the Department for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Management to harmonize capacity calculations at all the United Nations duty stations and to be proactive in the management of documents went some way towards realizing the reforms set out in General Assembly resolution 60/236 B. Care must be taken, however, to ensure that the use of computer-assisted translation did not compromise accuracy or quality. His delegation welcomed the fact that the overall utilization factor had increased from 83 per cent in 2004 to 85 per cent in 2005. While the 80 per cent benchmark had been achieved for the first time in New York, the utilization factor had fallen in other duty stations. Efforts to eliminate the waste of conference service resources should include punctuality in the conduct of meetings since every hour of fully serviced conference time cost the Organization thousands of dollars. Unscheduled meetings, should be kept to a minimum, for they used resources that could otherwise be diverted to the Development Account. The Fifth Committee, however, sometimes had to meet for long hours to complete its work and should be assured adequate budgetary resources. Equitable treatment for all duty stations and all the official languages of the United Nations should be ensured. In that context, his delegation was concerned at the high vacancy rate in the language services in Nairobi. The issue should be addressed as a priority.

44. With regard to the servicing of meetings of the regional and other major groupings of Member States, the figures showed a positive trend, with 87 per cent of meetings in 2005 being provided with interpretation, as against 85 per cent in 2004. There was, however, considerable scope for improvement, given that, between May 2001 and April 2002, 98 per cent of meetings of regional groupings had been provided with interpretation services. The work of the intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations depended heavily on the quality and accuracy of the translation and interpretation provided. His delegation would therefore like to know more about how complaints by Member States on the quality of translation were dealt with. All conference documents should also be issued simultaneously in all six languages to ensure that all Member States could participate in debates. As for the summary records of the meetings of intergovernmental bodies, the primary aim should be to provide accurate and effective records rather than attempt to save costs. In view of the imminent retirement of a sizeable proportion of trained language staff, his delegation welcomed the proposal contained in paragraph 86 of the Secretary-General's report (A/61/129).

45. The perennial problem of the late issuance of documentation adversely affected the deliberations of intergovernmental bodies, particularly in the case of smaller delegations. Although the proportion of documents issued in a timely manner had risen in the past year, it was still far from satisfactory.

Transparency and accountability were crucial in that regard, particularly in relation to feedback from the intergovernmental bodies concerned.

46. Lastly, since construction work was due to start in the near future in pursuance of the capital master plan, his delegation wished to encourage all those requesting meetings at Headquarters to liaise with the Department for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services for the optimum use of scarce conference space.

47. **Mr. Getachew** (Ethiopia) welcomed the improvement in the overall utilization rate of conference services across all the United Nations duty stations. It was particularly encouraging that the utilization rate of the Economic Commission for Africa, based in Addis Ababa, had risen to 67.9 per cent over the period from January to June 2006. In that connection, he was happy to learn that the Commission had a strong information technology team and good printing and publication facilities. He therefore agreed with the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Management that the African Union should consider outsourcing some of its publishing work to the Commission. He also concurred with the suggestion that the Commission should cooperate more closely with the United Nations Office in Nairobi in the area of technology and the exchange of experience and good practices.

48. **Ms. Udo** (Chairperson of the Committee on Conferences) said that, rather than take up the Committee's time, she would defer giving detailed answers to the important questions that had been put until they could be considered at the informal consultations.

49. **Mr. Chen** (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Management) said that all the comments made would be taken into account in the Department's future mandate. As for the consolidated report on the Organization's work, requested by the Russian Federation in accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/283, he understood that the resolution referred to a prototype that called for comments on content and style rather than a document for current consideration.

Agenda item 118: Programme planning (A/61/6 (Part one) and (Progs. 1-27), A/61/16, A/61/64, A/61/83 and Corr.1 and A/61/125)

50. **Ms. Taylor Roberts** (Chairman of the Committee for Programme and Coordination), introducing the report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) on its forty-sixth session (A/61/16), said that CPC had reviewed programme questions, including the programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 2004-2005; the proposed strategic framework for the biennium 2008-2009; and a number of evaluation reports issued by the Office of Internal Oversight Services. It had also considered coordination questions in relation to the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination; the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD); and the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) entitled "Further measures to strengthen United Nations system support to the New Partnership for Africa's Development", together with comments on that report by the Secretary-General and the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination. It had further considered the issue of improving its working methods and procedures.

51. CPC had commended the Office of Internal Oversight Services for improving the United Nations programme performance report for 2004-2005, in response to requests by the General Assembly and CPC and for advancing a results-based culture in the United Nations. CPC had also recommended that all programme managers and their staff should make greater use of programme performance data in decision-making.

52. CPC had examined both parts of the proposed strategic framework for the period 2008-2009. On the plan outline (part one) of the proposed strategic framework, CPC had recommended its review by the General Assembly so as to reflect more accurately the longer-term objectives of the Organization. As for the biennial programme plan (part two), CPC had made recommendations on 26 of the 27 programmes included in the plan. It had recommended that programme 19 (Human rights) should be allocated to the Third Committee for review and action and programme 7 (Economic and social affairs), subprogramme 1 (Economic and Social Council support and coordination), to the Second Committee for review and action under the agenda item entitled

"Programme planning", in accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/257, paragraph 3.

53. CPC had agreed that the Office of Internal Oversight Services should continue to undertake thematic evaluations for submission to CPC and selected the topics for evaluation up to 2009. CPC had made a number of recommendations on the question of coordination in connection with the annual overview report of the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination for 2005-2006. CPC had, inter alia, recommended that the Board should report on progress in overcoming the difficulties encountered by United Nations agencies in addressing the issues of malnutrition and hunger.

54. The Committee had also made recommendations relating to the Secretary-General's report on United Nations system support for NEPAD and noted key achievements by United Nations agencies in implementing NEPAD.

55. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 59/275, paragraph 25, CPC had held a meeting on its working methods and procedures, taking as a basis for its work the conclusions and recommendations on the item adopted at its thirty-eighth to forty-fourth sessions and proposals put forward by delegations at the forty-fifth and fifty-sixth sessions. Following a full discussion of the item, she had presented an informal paper that had enjoyed the broad agreement of CPC (A/61/16, para. 439).

56. **Mr. Sach** (Controller), introduced the proposed strategic framework for the biennium 2008-2009 (A/61/6 (Part one and Progs. 1-27)), prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 58/269 and 59/275 and the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (ST/SGB/2000/8). The proposed strategic framework comprised the plan outline and the biennial programme plan, covering 27 programmes. It was a translation of legislative mandates into programmes and subprogrammes and would form the basis of the proposed programme budget for 2008-2009.

57. In the 2005 World Summit Outcome, which had been taken fully into account during the preparation of the proposed strategic framework, Member States had reaffirmed the importance of an effective multilateral system and acknowledged that good governance and the rule of law at the national and international levels were essential for sustained economic growth, sustainable development and the eradication of poverty and hunger. They had also resolved to take concrete measures to continue finding ways to implement the outcome of the Millennium Summit and the other major United Nations conferences and summits. The proposed priorities for the period 2008-2009 were set out in paragraph 9 of document A/61/6 (Part one).

58. The proposed strategic framework had already been reviewed by relevant sectoral, functional and regional bodies. However, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 58/269, programmes would be updated, as appropriate, to reflect the impact of intergovernmental decisions taken after the preparation of the framework. Furthermore, each programme would be reviewed in detail during the preparation of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009. The experience acquired since the introduction of the logical framework had informed the preparation of the proposals and the practice of reporting on results achieved had also contributed to a greater understanding of that framework.

59. During its deliberations, the Fifth Committee would also consider programmatic adjustments to the biennial programme plan for the period 2006-2007. The proposed revisions, which had been reviewed by the Committee for Programme and Coordination, related to programmes 7 (Economic and social affairs), 11 (Environment), 14 (Economic and social development in Africa) and 16 (Economic development in Europe) and were set out in document A/61/125.

60. **Mr. Guerassev** (Office of Internal Oversight Services) introduced the Secretary-General's report on the programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 2004-2005 (A/61/64). The report was once again available in two versions — printed and electronic. The former was as concise as possible, whereas the latter was comprehensive, incorporating more than 1,200 hyperlinks to relevant information.

61. In general, the Office of Internal Oversight Services had observed a noticeable improvement in the substance and timeliness of monitoring and reporting during the biennium 2004-2005, due in part to intensive training provided by the Office. Chapter I of the report gave an overview of key results achieved by the United Nations, whereas chapter II set out the results achieved by individual programmes. In response to the requests made by the Committee for

Programme and Coordination and the General Assembly, the report also contained a specific section on challenges, obstacles and unmet goals at the programme level. Chapter I, section B, of the report presented a summary analysis of delivery of outputs and resource utilization, while chapter II set out the total implementation rates for each programme and subprogramme.

62. The implementation rate for mandated outputs had increased from 84 per cent in 2002-2003 to 90 per cent, which was the highest rate ever achieved by the Secretariat. It was therefore clear that there had been more realistic planning and more effective use of resources during the reporting period. The partnerships between OIOS and the Programme Planning and Budget Division and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs had been central to the Office's efforts to strengthen the Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System (IMDIS). A number of its new features and facilities had enhanced the collection, analysis and presentation of data on programmatic accomplishments.

63. Turning to the report of OIOS on strengthening the role of evaluation and the application of evaluation findings on programme design, delivery and policy directives (A/61/83 and Corr.1), he said that it contained an overview of evaluation practice and capacity in the Secretariat during the biennium 2004-2005. It summarized the conduct of evaluations in the Secretariat and presented the key findings of a meta-evaluation of a sample of evaluation reports produced during the biennium in question. The report concluded by proposing topics for in-depth and thematic evaluation for the period 2007-2009.

64. The report detailed two key findings: first, at the programme level, the Secretariat presented a mixed picture in terms of evaluation practice. Some departments had dedicated staff and resources, whereas others undertook evaluations on an ad hoc basis. The lack of common terminology for defining evaluations was an ongoing problem. While OIOS had endeavoured to clarify monitoring and evaluation terms by publishing an online glossary and an evaluation manual, more needed to be done.

65. The report's second key finding was that the OIOS central evaluation capacity was inadequate and unable to fully meet its mandate. In that connection, he drew attention to paragraph 24 of the report and stressed that conducting an in-depth evaluation once every 27 years was not an acceptable approach to the mandate contained in regulation 7.1 of ST/SGB/2000/8. Since the preparation of in-depth and thematic evaluations took up nearly all the capacity of the four current staff members of the Evaluation Section, very few resources could be spared for other mandated activities, such as quality assurance, the adaptation and transfer of evaluation information and the provision of methodological support.

66. Lastly, he pointed out that the Committee for Programme and Coordination, at its forty-sixth session, had noted that evaluation was a critically important function and that the report provided a helpful and informative account of the frequency and quality of evaluation practice. Since the subject of evaluation capacity was among the issues being debated in the context of the independent external evaluation of the auditing, oversight and governance systems of the United Nations, he looked forward to receiving guidance from the Fifth Committee on the measures needed to strengthen that capacity at all levels.

67. **Ms. Lock** (South Africa), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Committee for Programme and Coordination, as the main subsidiary organ of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly devoted to planning, programming and coordination, played a fundamental role in programme design by ensuring that the Secretariat accurately interpreted and translated legislative mandates into programmes and subprogrammes and by identifying programmatic changes arising from decisions taken by intergovernmental bodies. It provided Member States with assurances that the Organization's objectives and strategies had been derived from the priorities set by them, thereby greatly facilitating the oversight role of the General Assembly.

68. She welcomed and strongly endorsed the recommendations contained in the report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination and expressed appreciation to OIOS for the improved format of the programme performance report. The Group of 77 and China trusted that programme managers would make every effort to improve programme delivery and that they would be held accountable for consistent underperformance.

69. At its forty-sixth session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination had reviewed the

proposed strategic framework for the biennium 2008-2009. The Committee was to be congratulated on completing its revision of the proposed biennial programme plan within the time allocated for that task. However, since the plan outline did not fully satisfy the provisions of General Assembly resolution 58/269 because it did not accurately reflect the longer-term objectives of the Organization, the Secretariat should review it and resubmit it to Member States for their consideration. In the meantime, it would be prudent to approve the priorities for the period 2008-2009 so as to prevent delays in the preparation of the next programme budget. In future, programme managers should play a more active role in the preparation of the plan outline and the Executive Office of the Secretary-General should oversee the drafting process.

70. The Committee had conducted a valuable and detailed examination of coordination questions arising from the report of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and the reports on the New Partnership for Africa's Development. The Board played a vital role in coordinating and enhancing the effectiveness of the United Nations system. In particular, it should endeavour to strengthen the implementation of the development agenda by continuing to coordinate the actions of all United Nations agencies in the fight against hunger and poverty and reporting on the progress achieved. The Board must continue to ensure effective coordination of the United Nations system support for NEPAD, since system-wide support for the New Partnership was a priority of the Organization. Accordingly, the Group supported the recommendation to strengthen the Economic Commission for Africa and the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa with a view to coordinating the contributions of United Nations agencies to NEPAD and assisting in its regional and global implementation. In that connection, the Group also shared the Committee's view about the importance of the thematic evaluations conducted by OIOS.

71. The Group of 77 and China appreciated the Committee's efforts to respond to the provisions of General Assembly resolution 60/257 and was satisfied that it had complied fully with the provisions of that resolution and of General Assembly resolution 59/275. The Committee, as an intergovernmental body, had and reserved the right to improve its working methods in any manner it deemed necessary, and the Group was therefore pleased that broad agreement had been reached on the Chairman's text. That development boded well for further discussions on the issue, which should be an ongoing item on the Committee's agenda.

72. It was vital to ensure that intergovernmental and expert bodies received the relevant documentation in advance. While she understood that the unique circumstances of the sixtieth session of the General Assembly had had an impact on the timely issuance of reports, she reiterated the need to abide by the six-week rule and urged the Secretariat to ensure that the documents for the forty-seventh session of the Committee for Programme and Coordination were issued well in advance. Lastly, she appealed to Member States to approach informal consultations in a constructive manner. It would not be useful to introduce divisive issues which would not meet with the approval of the whole membership.

73. **Mr. Pyysalo** (Finland), speaking on behalf of the European Union; the acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania; the candidate countries Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the stabilization and association process countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia; and, in addition, Iceland, Moldova, Norway and Ukraine, stressed the importance of having an accurate and comprehensive analysis of the strategic framework, which should guide the Secretariat on the priorities to be pursued and the way to ensure their proper implementation. Accordingly, efforts should be made to strengthen the related reports.

74. The Committee for Programme and Coordination played an important role in the preparation of the budget. Pending a reform of the current budgetary procedures, the Committee should assess the planning phase on the basis of the relevant indicators of achievement and expected accomplishments. In that connection, he stressed the need to improve the Committee's working methods with a view to responding efficiently to the requirements of the Organization's current structure, in accordance with the repeated requests of the General Assembly and the decision taken by the Committee itself at its forty-fourth session.

75. The European Union welcomed the report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination and viewed its contents in a positive light. However, a number of issues concerning the Committee's working methods would need to be discussed at its forty-

seventh session. Some of those issues could be considered during the review of budgetary procedures to be undertaken at the sixty-second session of the General Assembly. He reaffirmed his commitment to reaching a common agreement on those questions.

76. No decision had been taken on the plan outline contained in part one of the Secretary-General's report (A/61/6 (Part one)). Furthermore, programme 19 (Human rights) and subprogramme 1 (Economic and Social Council support and coordination) of programme 7 (Economic and social affairs), remained to be finalized. He hoped that the views of relevant experts would be taken into account during the discussion of those items.

77. **Mr. Torrington** (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, endorsed the recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination and welcomed its efforts to take account of the interests of all Member States. He commended the Committee for the successful outcome of its deliberations on the proposed strategic framework for the period 2008-2009 and for its role in coordinating various issues, including system-wide support for NEPAD and the fight against hunger and poverty. Lastly, referring to efforts of the Committee for Programme and Coordination to improve its working methods, he welcomed the submission by the Chairman of a text that had enjoyed the broad agreement and support of the Committee. His delegation was committed to advancing the discussion on the basis of that text.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.